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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/AGS (HIRONIMUS)

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [SMIG](#) [AU](#)
SUBJECT: MINORITY RIGHTS AND DIVISIVE POLITICS IN CARINTHIA

Classified By: Political-Economic Counselor J. Dean Yap for reasons 1.4
(d)

¶1. (C) EconPolOff met November 17 with Dr. Marjam Sturm, head of the "Central Association for Slovenes", in Klagenfurt to discuss the situation of the Slovene minority in Carinthia province. Sturm averred that Slovenes are reasonably content in Carinthia, except for the rhetoric of certain local politicians. He stated bluntly that Carinthia's major problem is its governor, Joerg Haider, who uses "divisive politics" to maintain political power in the region.

¶2. (C) First, he said, Haider alienated minority groups by railing against a law requiring the province to post certain street signs in Slovenian. And now, he added, the governor is advocating a ban on the building of mosques in Carinthia. This provocative rhetoric creates a climate of distrust and fear between ethnic Austrians and minority groups.

¶3. (C) Haider's days are numbered, predicts Sturm, as the economic and political situation changes in Carinthia. Haider is suffering from the bleak economic situation in the province and his failed economic policies. Haider's messages of fear and division are increasingly falling on deaf ears. In fact, Sturm predicts that Haider will be gone in the next five years and says people in the province are already beginning to turn on the governor.

¶4. (U) While Haider attempts to use divisive politics for political gain, Sturm is attempting to facilitate cooperation and unity among the ethnic groups in the province. For instance, Sturm has recently initiated a dialog with his one-time rival, Josef Feldner, leader of the conservative veterans' group, "Kaerntner Heimatdienst". Through this working relationship, Sturm and Feldner are providing leadership for their respective ethnic groups by encouraging cooperation between the ethnic Slovene minority and the Austrian majority in tackling the economic and social problems of Carinthia. They jointly published a book on this issue that, at the very least, has symbolic value.

¶5. (C) Comment: Post believes that Haider's prospects are greater than Sturm suggests. Nonetheless, Sturm's lack of great concern, his outreach to conservative ethnic Austrians, and his view of the situation of Slovenes in Carinthia suggest that the Slovenes do indeed enjoy a good measure of political comfort and security. End Comment
McCaw